

Section 2 Public Relations

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1-201 General

The subject of public relations can be divided into the following categories:

- Internal relations among Caltrans personnel
- Relations with the contractor
- Relations with utility companies and other public agencies
- Relations with property owners
- Relations with the general public

1-201 General

1-202 Relations Among Caltrans Personnel

Within Caltrans, public relations can be divided into two subcategories: 1) relations between the resident engineer and staff and 2) relations between the resident engineer and the district.

1-202 Relations Among Caltrans Personnel

1-202A The Resident Engineer and Staff

Development and maintenance of good relations between Caltrans personnel is largely a matter of adequate communication and a clear division of responsibility. Employees must know precisely what their responsibilities are, and they must be given the authority to handle these responsibilities.

The most important communications are between project personnel and the resident engineer. It is recommended strongly that resident engineers hold short staff meetings each workweek. At these meetings the resident engineer should brief assistant resident engineers on the week's operations, announce any changes or new assignments of responsibility, and discuss any other pertinent subjects.

Resident engineers should provide personnel with an opportunity to demonstrate their strongest capabilities and highest capacity for responsibility. The resident engineer should ensure that assistant resident engineers have an opportunity to gain experience in the various construction phases.

Assignment rotation is encouraged as long as the effectiveness of the overall operation does not suffer. Similarly, if feasible, assign personnel to operations different from those handled on previous projects. Newly assigned personnel should study the application portions of the *Standard Specifications*, special provisions, the plans, this *Construction Manual*, and any other applicable publications of Caltrans. An individual should not be required to perform new duties until the resident engineer is assured that the person is capable of performing them correctly and effectively.

1-202B The Resident Engineer and the District

Communication is a two-way responsibility. Resident engineers should adequately inform their supervisors of facts so the supervisors are not embarrassed by learning about project events from outside sources. Conversely, good management practice

requires that supervisors keep their personnel informed of decisions affecting an employee's area of responsibility. Communication has failed whenever a resident engineer first hears about a district decision from outside sources.

An important phase of internal relations is the necessity for working with other functional units within the organization. People in other units do their work with information available to them, just as construction forces do. They, too, have problems in their work. When there is a difference of opinion on some part of the project, whether it is about design, traffic handling, or some other feature, the resident engineer should approach the other party with an open mind to discuss the problem.

1-203 Relations With the Contractor

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In communicating with the contractor and the contractor's personnel, it is important that the resident engineer take a clear position. It is far better to start on a basis of administering the contract firmly in accordance with the plans and specifications than it is to correct a situation caused by laxity later in the contract's life. The employees assigned to construction must have a thorough knowledge of the plans and specifications governing the contract. Clear evidence of possession of this knowledge will go a long way in promoting smooth relations with the contractor's personnel. If the resident engineer and assistant resident engineers know the plans and specifications thoroughly, the contractor's personnel will respect the resident engineer's judgment in cases where interpretation becomes necessary. A satisfactory relationship between Caltrans and the contractor at all levels is an important result of smooth relations between the resident engineer and the contractor's superintendent.

Proper and ethical contract administration requires the exercise of several essential attributes. Ideally, resident engineers and assistant resident engineers should be experienced, resourceful, and considerate, in addition to having a thorough knowledge of the specifications and the work to be done.

Numerous collateral duties are also included in contract administration. These duties, which are equally as important as good engineering, include the following: competent record keeping, well-monitored personnel activities, enforcement of labor laws, and oversight of safety.

The primary responsibility, however, is to ensure that the rights of both Caltrans and the contractor are equally and impartially enforced. The taxpayers are entitled to what they pay for, and the contractor is entitled to payment for constructing the work as defined by the contract.

In general, there are two types of specifications: "end-result" and "method." For work governed by end-result specifications, the engineer determines "what" and the contractor decides "how."

Method specifications are more restrictive as to the contractor's options. Deviations from specified methods require contract change orders. Deviations must also provide equal or better results while preserving the contract's integrity. Finally, the rights of unsuccessful bidders must be protected.

If any doubt exists about a contractual matter, the resident engineer has an obligation to clarify in writing the Caltrans' position for the contractor.

1-204 Relations With Utility Companies and Other Public Agencies

Good public relations will have a beneficial effect in dealing with the personnel of utility companies and other public agencies. To make it easier to work with such personnel during the contract's life, the resident engineer should make early personal contact with the appropriate person at the utility company, governmental agency, or department with which Caltrans will be dealing. The resident engineer should establish a good working relationship with local school districts, the Highway Patrol, and local police organizations. Personal contact with the personnel from these agencies, with the resident engineer acquainting them with the operations before actual construction, will enable them to schedule their work or services to the best advantage of all concerned.

1-205 Relations With Property Owners

Another important part of public relations is courteously dealing with the property owners near the project. The owners are the ones most affected by construction operations.

By courteously listening to the property owner's problem, request, or question and by taking the time to explain or answer, the resident engineer can generate faith that Caltrans is not an impersonal organization running roughshod over the general public or the individual. Sometimes this human approach will reduce unreasonable demands and complaints by the property owner.

Construction operations (for example, temporary closures of streets and driveways and construction noise, especially at night) may have an adverse effect on nearby residents and businesses adjacent to the project. Informing business owners and residents near the project about the reason for, and the duration of, the activity will go a long way toward a higher degree of acceptance and tolerance. Timely notice is important. Also consider rescheduling construction activity around major business or public events.

Start public relations early. The fullest possible cooperation of the contractor's organization should be solicited to achieve good public relations most effectively. By calling on property owners together, the resident engineer and the superintendent can assure owners that inconvenience and the nuisance of noise and dust will be kept to a minimum. For some projects on metropolitan freeways, contractors have distributed their own informational folders to property owners. This practice should be encouraged.

1-206 Relations With the General Public

The main differences in public relations toward the property owners and the general public occur in the scope of coverage and the degree of personal contact. When highway construction information must be conveyed to large numbers of highway users (including those who commute regularly over a particular route and those who use the route only occasionally), contact the public information officer early in the project. The most satisfactory method is for the officer to make full use of the press, radio, internet, and television to publicize the upcoming work.

Another proven method of promoting good public relations is to use district personnel as speakers at meetings of the local chamber of commerce and service clubs. Resident engineers so inclined might consider joining a service organization. Frequent notices and progress reports in the local press are also very common and effective methods of keeping the public informed of changing project conditions.

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On advice by the resident engineer, the district should also issue press releases. The district should contact members of the local press before the job starts, inform them how they can contact the proper person for information throughout the contract, and invite them to tour the project with the resident engineer. In special cases, the district may prepare and distribute pamphlets to motorists who are delayed as they pass through construction. If the traveling public outside of the district will be affected, the Caltrans information officer in Sacramento must be advised directly.

Project personnel should always keep in mind that they are representatives of Caltrans and the State of California. As such, they are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that will command respect and be a credit to the organization.